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SUBJECT: EL SALVADOR: REPORT ON FORCED AND CHILD LABOR IN
THE PRODUCTION OF GOODS

REF: A. STATE 43120

[B](#). SAN SALVADOR 0253

[1](#)1. (U) Summary: This cable is in response to the Department of Labor request for information regarding the use of forced labor and exploitative child labor in the production of goods in El Salvador as mandated by the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2005 (ref A). Post notes that the list of goods provided in this cable is not/not indicative of the level of forced labor or exploitative child labor in El Salvador as the instructions exclude labor that occurs in the service industry. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (U) Post reports that the following goods, listed in paragraph 3, are alleged to be produced with exploitative child or forced labor. There are no exact figures of the scope and extent of child labor in El Salvador. The most recent comprehensive and reliable data regarding child labor was published in a 2004 ILO report, Understanding Children,s Work in El Salvador. In 2007, the ILO published additional information regarding child labor in the fishing and sugar industries. There are no final reports on goods produced by forced labor and post was unable to find an NGO that could provide detailed information on the incidence of forced labor in El Salvador. The information in this cable is based on information provided by employers, employees, the ILO, the United Nations Children,s Fund (UNICEF), NGOs, press reports, and LabOff,s site visits.

3.(U) The following are goods alleged to be produced with exploitative child labor or forced labor:

Coffee

Although the Government of El Salvador (GOES) has not classified coffee production as one of the worst forms of child labor, children are used extensively in the harvesting of coffee. According to credible sources, the harvesting process is often conducted under dangerous and physically difficult circumstances and often prevents children from attending school.

During trips to the western zone of the country, and to a coffee plantation located near the capital of San Salvador (ref B), LabOff observed children of all ages employed during the coffee harvest. Much of the work involved children under 15, and several who appeared to be under the age of 10, working on steep, treacherous mountainsides harvesting coffee beans. Other children were observed carrying large, heavy bags of harvested coffee. While most plantations claim to restrict child labor to the less dangerous and less strenuous aspects of the harvest, these rules appear to be rarely enforced.

Employers and employees from the Ahuachapan Department, located in the western zone of El Salvador, as well as the ILO, have confirmed that children participate in the coffee harvest. Other credible sources acknowledge that although the employment of children under age 12 is illegal, many of the children participating in the harvest are less than ten years old. Typically the harvest begins at 5:30 AM and ends by 3:00 PM; however, workers at many plantations work additional hours because they are paid by the *arroba*, a 25 pound bag. Children typically work alongside their family members and will often work the same hours. According to government sources, all workers, particularly children, also are subject to health risks due to the pesticides used at many plantations.

From January to April 2008, the Ministry of Labor (MOL) reported conducting 134 scheduled inspections and 39 unscheduled inspections of coffee plantations. (Note: These inspections are not specifically focused on child labor. End note.) None of the employers visited by LabOff reported any inspections for over a year.

Sugar

The GOES has classified the harvesting of sugar as one of the worst forms of child labor, and according to credible sources children frequently participate in the sugar harvest, called the *zafra*. According to these reports, children participating in the *zafra* suffer from cuts caused by sharp tools (often machetes), arthritis, back pain, allergies, cold

and flu-type illnesses, asthma, and other injuries. Most sugar is cultivated in the departments of Sonsonate, La Libertad, San Salvador, La Paz, San Vicente, Usulután, San Miguel, and Ahuachapan. Children who work in the department of San Miguel will often ride public transportation to the sugar plantations as early as 5 AM. (Note: Public transportation, typically buses, is quite dangerous in El Salvador, especially in the rural areas, at any time of day. End note.) Also, the money earned by children, particularly those less than 12 years old, is frequently given to the parents. Many children never see the money they earn.

In November 2007, Marketing Week published allegations that a multinational company beverage company was involved with Salvadoran sugar producers who were using child labor. In May 2005, the Labor Study Center (CENTRA) and the International Labor Rights Fund published a report that corroborated reports of children as young as ten years old working on sugar plantations. The report was based on surveys with 524 sugarcane harvesters, 110 refinery workers, and 60 drivers who transport sugarcane. The report also said that 37 percent of male workers reported receiving help from children, while 55 percent of women reported receiving help from children.

In 2004, Human Rights Watch (HRW) published a report on the use of child labor on sugarcane plantations. It reported that many children suffered from injuries from machetes and other sharp tools, and that one child lost a part of his finger due to an accident. The HRW also reported that medical treatment is often unavailable on plantations and that when they do receive medical treatment, the children, or their parents when available, are required to pay.

In 2004, an article by the Washington Post, *El Salvador Scarred by Child Labor*,⁸ reported on the use of child labor in the sugar industry and detailed the injuries of a 14 year old boy with numerous machete scars.

From January to April 2008, the Ministry of Labor reports conducting 265 scheduled inspections of sugar cane plantations.

The Sugar Producers Foundation (FUNDAZUCAR) conducts programs

to combat child labor in three departments of El Salvador. FUNDAZUCAR, in conjunction with the ILO, conducts a program to counter child labor in three municipalities of San Miguel: El Transito, Concepcion Batres, and San Miguel. This program is scheduled to end in September 2008. The second program, conducted with the support of the Inter-American Development Bank, is in Usulután and is designed to promote employment alternatives for children who leave the sugarcane plantations. The third program is being implemented with funds from the Coca-Cola Company and promotes crop diversification and new agricultural techniques. This program is scheduled to end in June 2008.

For the 2007-08 harvest, FUNDAZUCAR, implemented a new requirement that prohibits its associates from purchasing sugar from cooperatives that have been cited by the MOL for child labor violations. According to FUNDAZUCAR, the cooperative with the most violations for child labor is called &Barra Ciega8 and no sugar from this producer was purchased by FUNDAZUCAR.

Fishing and Mollusk Extraction

The GOES has classified fishing and mollusk extraction as one of the worst forms of child labor. The ILO has identified five areas in which child labor is used in the fishing and mollusk industries: Mendez Island and Corral de Mulas I and II located in Puerto El Triunfo, the department of Usulután, the port of Acajutla located in the department of Sonsonate, and the community of Coyolito located in the Department of Chalatenango.

Credible sources report that children as young as seven years old are employed in these industries and perform such tasks as moving gasoline tanks, installing nets, extracting and collecting fish from the nets, and selecting and processing the fish (which involves the use of knives). Children who collect mollusks do so by wading in mosquito-infested swamps. Credible sources also report that many children smoke constantly while working in order to repel mosquitoes.

According to GOES sources, children employed in the fishing and mollusk industries can suffer from respiratory problems, (including asthma), mycosis, vision and hearing impairment (due to frequent immersion in polluted water), hyperactivity (the effect of constant exposure to tobacco), and skin infections.

From January through April 2008 the Ministry of Labor reported conducting one scheduled inspection and one unscheduled inspection of fishing/mollusk employers.

Charcoal

Although there have been some reports of children involved in the production of charcoal in El Salvador, post has been unable to corroborate these reports.

Fireworks

The GOES has classified the production of fireworks as one of the worst forms of child labor due to the use of gunpowder and other explosive materials. Sources report that children continue to be used in the production of fireworks and a 2003 press report claimed that factories which produce fireworks do not follow safety protocols and use child labor extensively.

A government official said that burns and amputated appendages are the most frequent injuries sustained by children working in the production of fireworks.

From January to April 2008, the MOL reported conducting one scheduled inspection of a fireworks factory.

Garments

Sources have reported allegations of exploitative child labor and forced labor in some maquilas (garment factories). In May 2008, sources reported that child labor was being used at a Korean operated maquila in the Olocuilta Free Trade zone. There were also allegations of compulsory overtime that exceeded the maximum normal workweek allowed by law. In February 2008, the Office of the Attorney General reported an ongoing investigation regarding the possible trafficking of persons for maquila labor.

Post was unable to obtain additional information about instances of child and forced labor in maquilas and the MOL did not provide any information regarding inspections of maquilas.

Other Agricultural Products

Post has also heard rumors of trafficking of agricultural workers along the Honduran border, but has been unable to corroborate these reports. The GOES has been unable to offer any information regarding these rumors and Post was unable to find NGOs or other groups which were in a position to document forced labor and trafficking in this region.

14. In its efforts to combat child labor in El Salvador, the ILO has focused on strengthening the role of the MOL,s Inspector,s Office. The GOES has focused its efforts on awareness programs which encourage school attendance and target children and their families. When MOL inspectors encounter child laborers, the government will remove the children and attempt to place them in educational programs. Many local experts say that the cultural acceptance of child labor is a significant obstacle to these efforts.
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